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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

273rd meeting

Thursday, 13 April 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Oh Joon ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Organization of work

The Chairman: As members are aware, the Commission has not finished its consideration of the election of the officials for the 2006 substantive session. I have received a letter from the Chairman of the Group of African States informing the Commission that the Group has endorsed Benin as its Vice-Chairman. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to elect Benin as its Vice-Chairman.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: Allow me, on the Commission's behalf, to welcome Benin as a new member of the Bureau. I will count on its support and counsel.

We still have to elect the Chair of Working Group I. As promised earlier, I have conducted bilateral consultations with the Groups as well as with some delegations interested in this matter. I believe I have found a suitable candidate in Mr. Jean-Francis Régis Zinsou of Benin. I think he has good qualifications, which impression has been confirmed in my initial consultations with delegations, who also found him a suitable candidate for this position. I would like to nominate him as a candidate for the chairmanship of Working Group I. His election would give a good balance to the work of the Commission, because I, as Chairman, am from Asia, our Brazilian colleague, the Chairman of Working Group II, is from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and Mr. Zinsou, of course, is from the African Group.

I would like to urge all members to agree to my proposal. However, I will provide time — until the end of today — for any member who has any other opinion on this nomination to come back to me. Otherwise, we will elect Mr. Zinsou as Chairman of Working Group I at our plenary meeting on Monday afternoon.

Organization of work: Measures for improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Commission

The Chairman: The issue of measures for improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Commission has been included on the agenda in accordance with General Assembly decision 52/492 of 8 September 1998, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", which, inter alia, stated in its subparagraph (b) that

> "the substantive agenda of the Disarmament Commission should normally comprise two agenda items per year ... the possibility of a third item would be retained if there was a consensus to adopt such an item".

I would like to recall that an agreement was reached during the open-ended consultations held last year under the chairmanship of Ambassador Rowe to discuss this issue during the present substantive session. In that regard, representatives have before them a conference room paper contained in document

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

06-31009 (E)

A/CN.10/2006/CRP.2, submitted by the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia to introduce that document.

Mr. Rachmianto (Indonesia): Allow me to present the views of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the issue of improving the working methods of the Disarmament Commission.

NAM is of the view that the multilateral disarmament machinery needs to be strengthened and revitalized. Multilateral forums such as the Disarmament Commission need to be improved and utilized more effectively to implement the Programme of Action contained in the Final Document (resolution S-10/2) of the tenth special session of the General Assembly and to strengthen the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. NAM has been contributing positively to the advancement of that objective within the framework of the General Assembly and in particular within the context of the First Committee. NAM emphasizes that improving the methods of work of the Disarmament Commission should be undertaken within the overall process of the revitalization of the General Assembly, in accordance with resolutions 58/126, 58/316 and 59/313 in particular.

NAM reaffirms the importance of the Disarmament Commission as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and as a deliberative body to consider and make recommendations to the General Assembly on various problems in the field of disarmament. Further, NAM would like to reaffirm that the Assembly has been and should continue to be the principal United Nations organ in the field of disarmament and the implementation of disarmament measures.

NAM believes that the provisions contained in General Assembly decision 52/492 of 8 September 1998 aimed at enhancing the efficient functioning of the Disarmament Commission remain relevant. We are of the view that, first, the substantive agenda of the Commission should comprise two agenda items per year, drawn from the whole range of disarmament issues, including one on nuclear disarmament; secondly, the annual substantive session of the Commission should last for three weeks; and thirdly, substantive agenda items should be considered for three years.

NAM underscores that it is important that the Commission function under the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, with such modifications as the Commission may deem necessary, and that it make every effort to ensure that, as far as possible, decisions on substantive issues are adopted by consensus.

NAM believes that the main difficulties confronting the Disarmament Commission are primarily attributable not to the ineffectiveness of its methods of work, but in fact to the stalemates in various disarmament forums resulting from the lack of political will of some Member States to move forward on measures related to nuclear disarmament. How to mobilize political will is, and should be, a more urgent challenge as well as a priority for us all.

Finally, NAM remains open to any proposal to revitalize, rationalize or streamline the work of the Disarmament Commission as an initial step in the direction of reviewing the overall disarmament machinery for the achievement of the principles and priorities contained in the Final Document of the tenth special session.

Mr. Bravaco (United States of America): The United States is pleased that the Disarmament Commission has decided to allocate equitable time to discuss measures for improving the effectiveness of its methods of work. Our delegation considers this exercise to be in keeping with the ongoing effort to achieve a lasting revolution of reform at the United Nations.

We are all painfully aware of the difficulties that the Commission had to overcome over the past nearly three years to agree on an agenda. The breakthrough last December on our agenda highlighted the necessity of compromise and consensus in multilateral endeavours. Although the Commission has now been revived and is moving forward on substantive issues, it also makes sense for delegations to review the Commission's methods of work, to reflect on ways to improve them and, on a consensual basis, to adopt measures that will enhance its effectiveness.

If there are new approaches that would enable the Disarmament Commission to avoid future interruptions, those should be explored and adopted. Similarly, innovations that could make the Commission more useful and relevant to the security needs of the international community should also be examined and embraced. Our delegation looks forward to listening to

the views of other delegations on this subject and to exchanging ideas on ways to make the Disarmament Commission work smarter and better.

Finally, our delegation wishes to underscore the importance of thoroughness in our work here on improving the Disarmament Commission. We believe that the Commission should engage in a full airing of views and options for improving the effectiveness of its working methods until we achieve a demonstrable and consensual outcome. Only in that manner can we collectively make the Disarmament Commission a more valuable tool for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Charwath (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The European Union regards the Disarmament Commission as an important part of the United Nations disarmament machinery. The Commission, as we all know, is the sole disarmament forum, except for the First Committee, with universal membership and has an important role to play as a deliberative body aimed at formulating recommendations in the broad field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

In the past, the UNDC has produced important results, such as, for example, the 1996 guidelines for arms transfers and the 1999 UNDC guidelines on conventional arms control and limitation and disarmament, with a particular emphasis on the consolidation of peace, as well as the 1999 guidelines on nuclear-weapon-free zones. We want to see the UNDC continue to play the role of contributing to creating a more secure and peaceful international environment.

It is in that context that we welcome this opportunity to engage in discussions on how to make sure that the UNDC can function effectively and fulfil the role we would all like it to play. The EU therefore supports discussing the issue of measures for improving the effectiveness of the methods of work. For the EU, the central question is: What can we all do to strengthen the UNDC and help ensure that it is able to do its work?

We look forward to an open exchange of views among member States and are willing to look at all constructive proposals to make the UNDC deliver the results we all hope to see as a result of our deliberations during its sessions. We believe that there is great merit in looking at possible practical and pragmatic steps to enhance the very functioning of the UNDC. The EU has always been very constructive in its approach to that issue, as evidenced also by our attitude last year in the discussions about an agenda for this cycle of the UNDC. I would like to assure members that we will continue to do so.

Mr. Cem Işik (Turkey): As this is the first time I have taken the floor, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the chairmanship and other members of the Bureau on the tasks they have assumed. You have my delegation's full support in your endeavours ahead.

Turkey also believes that the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) is an important part of the United Nations disarmament machinery. My country also supports discussing the issue of measures for improving the effectiveness of the UNDC's methods of work, including possible practical and pragmatic steps to enhance its functioning. Therefore, my country associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Milton (Australia): As my delegation noted in its general debate statement in this Commission, the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) must show that it can address today's most pressing international security concerns. To be relevant and credible, the Commission must produce outcomes. It is not enough to meet for meeting's sake.

We agree with the European Union that there is merit in looking at practical and pragmatic steps to enhance the functioning of this body. Australia remains flexible and constructive in its approach and will consider any proposal that will help the UNDC to play a role in contributing to a more secure and peaceful international environment and to respond to today's most pressing threats.

Mr. Cheng Jingye (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation welcomes this opportunity to discuss how to improve the working methods of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC). I should like to take this opportunity to share some of our views on this matter.

First, the 1978 first special session on disarmament established a multilateral arms control and disarmament machinery that included the First

Committee of the General Assembly, the UNDC and the Conference on Disarmament. As an integral part of that machinery, the UNDC has made useful contributions to promoting the multilateral arms control and disarmament process, and its status and role are irreplaceable. Therefore, any initiative to improve its working methods should be conducive to strengthening rather than to weakening the UNDC.

Secondly, we are of the view that we should approach the issue of improving the working methods of the UNDC objectively and rationally. It should be noted that the main factor impeding the current process of multilateral arms control and disarmament is the lack of political will, rather than procedural or organizational problems. Given its nature as a deliberative body for disarmament matters, the UNDC's main task should be the formulation of guiding principles and recommendations for multilateral arms control and disarmament. That task should not and will not be changed.

Thirdly, we hope that we will bear in mind the need to uphold the authority of the UNDC and proceed on that basis to discussing how to make full use of existing resources and to further enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. My delegation will take an active part in the relevant discussions in an open and flexible manner and will strive tirelessly to safeguard and strengthen the multilateral arms control and disarmament mechanisms.

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): I was part of the discussion on placing on the agenda the question of the working methods of the Commission. I thought that some delegations that supported that idea felt that we really needed to discuss the issue, even though we had some reservations about it, because the priority at the time we discussed it was the agenda. We thought that having an agenda and getting the Commission really working was more important than looking at the working methods. However, as part of our own policy of listening to and working and cooperating with other delegations that may have relevant and very good ideas that we may not understand, we agreed that we should discuss this issue.

But again, now that it is on the table, we are still asking ourselves: What is wrong with the working methods of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC)? I think we have to answer that question. What is wrong with them? What are the current methods? Are we talking about reform for its own sake? Just because all the other institutions or organs of the United Nations are going through a reform process, do we want to join that bandwagon, so to speak?

I think we should examine what exactly is wrong with the working methods — not the UNDC as such, but the working methods, which to me relates to the proposal in the working paper of the Non-Aligned Movement, which deals with the range of issues. When we talk about working methods, we are talking about the cycle. Is there anything wrong with the previous cycle? Is there anything wrong with having two agenda items? Do we want four agenda items, or do we want just one? Those are questions we must be asking when we talk about the working methods.

Do we want to amend or adjust the rules of procedure? We are working on the basis of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. To what extent can we adjust that to the realities of the Commission itself? How far can we go? This has nothing to do with the substantive issues of the Commission. Other delegations have been talking about lack of political will. I think that we should separate the political aspects of the so-called reform or revitalization from procedural issues.

As far as we see it, the issue of working methods is a procedural one. We went through the process in the First Committee. We talked about biennialization, shorter draft resolutions, trying to avoid overlaps and repetitions, and so forth. My delegation made a contribution to the process, and submitted a working paper and, as a member of the Bureau, working with Ambassador De Alba two years ago, we were interested in the effort to revitalize the working methods of the First Committee. We have done that. So we find it very difficult to understand the rationale of spending so much time on the working methods in terms of procedure.

As far as the working methods are concerned — apart from questions relating to the rules of procedure and the cycle of agenda items — the Commission used to hold two sessions annually. Now we have only one. Do we need two?

I think the question of decision-making is an important one. The Non-Aligned Movement proposal refers to the general tradition that we should try, as far as possible, to ensure that decisions on substantive

issues are made by consensus. From my delegation's point of view, perhaps we should examine the whole issue of consensus. Let us look at what happened last year, when we were trying to get an agenda — or the simple matter of even having a First Committee draft resolution on the report of the Commission. How painful that process was, because we were trying to get consensus.

So if we talk about the effectiveness of our working methods, we might want to re-examine that. We do not have any proposals about that, but I think that it falls within the orbit of the idea of revitalization of working methods.

Then there is another issue: the relationship between the various parts of the disarmament machinery. Paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 60/91 — the most recent resolution on the report of the Disarmament Commission —

> "Reaffirms also the importance of further enhancing the dialogue and cooperation among the First Committee of the General Assembly, the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament".

When we talk about revitalization or working methods, we may want to look into that. I do not see any dialogue between us and our colleagues in Geneva. The report of the Conference is sent to the Commission annually. The report of the First Committee is also sent to the Commission. What do we do with them? The Conference itself has been discussing its improved and effective functioning. Its most recent report states that:

> "The importance of the improved and effective functioning of the Conference was addressed by delegates in plenary meetings. Their views on the issue are duly reflected in the plenary records" (*A/60/27, para. 17*).

Is there a possibility that we can have a dialogue, within existing resources, between the Conference and the Commission? Would it help? Would it improve our effectiveness? To summarize, these are the issues that we should be looking into: the cycle of the work of the Commission, the number of items on the agenda, the question of the rules of procedure, decision-making, the whole idea of consensus, and the relationship between the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament — the whole idea of dialogue.

Again, I wanted to show that we would like to hear specific recommendations on this. As we mentioned last Monday, we hope that we will be able to make at least some recommendations to the Assembly. We cannot go on for the next three years talking about improving the effectiveness of the Commission. We would like to see, specifically, on paper, what is wrong: first of all, we must identify what is wrong with the working methods. If we do not know what is wrong, we cannot fix it. What are the weaknesses? Are there, in fact, weaknesses? I am referring not to political issues, but to the working methods.

The Chairman: I thank Ambassador Rowe of Sierra Leone for his thought-provoking questions. They come from someone who conducted consultations that produced agreement on the inclusion of this issue on our agenda today.

I fully agree with him that we need to get to specific discussions on issues: we are supposed to discuss working methods here, so we need to discuss those methods. I think that the list of issues that he gave us to talk about is a good starting point, and I would like to encourage all member States to look at those issues and come back to us with their views and comments on them when we have another plenary meeting on this matter.

Mr. Dos Santos (Brazil): I would like to make a few comments in the ongoing debate on the working methods of the Disarmament Commission.

As we discuss the issue of how the Disarmament Commission could effectively improve its methods of work, we should not simply reiterate that little progress has been made in the past and that important processes have been reversed. We believe that the difficulties in improving the effectiveness of the Commission over recent years must be overcome, bearing in mind that among member States priorities necessarily vary and that the will to implement commitments may vary likewise.

In that regard, we support the comment made by our colleague from Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement that the main difficulties confronting the Commission are attributable primarily not to the ineffectiveness of its method of work, but to the overall strategic stalemate in various disarmament forums and the lack of political will by some States to

move forward on matters of key importance for international peace and security.

Even though we believe that the main problem is more political than administrative, let me make some concrete proposals that we believe could be useful in our debate.

First, the early election of the Bureau could facilitate follow-up on agreed subjects, as well as allow for the convening of advanced consultations with a view to the following sessions. Secondly, consideration of the best use of time should be respectful of the right of delegations to express freely whatever they deem important and of the need to grant to each of them the appropriate amount of time. Thirdly, the possibility of excluding some agenda items should be carefully examined on a case-by-case basis.

As my delegation mentioned in the general exchange of views (see A/CN.10/PV.269), this is a deliberative body with universal participation, dedicated to a long-term discussion of disarmament issues with a view to the submission of concrete recommendations to the General Assembly. Its location within the purview of the General Assembly means that it is the right place to hold thematic discussions on disarmament issues as they relate to the maintenance of international peace and security. It is not a body that negotiates legally binding agreements, and therefore it does not operate under the constraints that characterize such negotiations.

I wish to conclude by recalling that new formal procedures and administrative arrangements are not enough for the United Nations membership to adopt the measures required for the revitalization of the Disarmament Commission. Root causes of the current political decline of the disarmament machinery have to be addressed. As we know, proposals abound. What we collectively need now is sufficient political will to adopt and implement them.

Mr. Vasiliev (Russian Federation): As my delegation stated during the general exchange of views (see A/CN.10/PV.271) and as stressed by some delegations in this room, we do not see the necessity of dismantling the existing triad in multilateral disarmament, namely, the First Committee, the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament. I would also stress that my delegation believes that it is important to take decisions on the question of the reform or improvement of methods of work of the Commission within this room and among the whole membership of this Commission, rather than wait until other bodies decide on the future of the Disarmament Commission. We all anticipate the discussion in the General Assembly of the Secretary-General's mandates report (A/60/733). I believe that this matter may also be raised in the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee. Those bodies may decide, inter alia, questions of funding and may press the Commission into taking decisions based on decisions of other bodies and may otherwise require the Commission to accommodate provisions of the overall reform of the United Nations.

We also support the view that when we are talking about improving the methods of work or the rationalization of the work of the Disarmament Commission, we are talking about the effectiveness and the outcome of our work, rather than the number of meetings we have and the duration of our discussion of the items before us. Because agreement might be reached on a certain issue within a single session. For example, in Working Group II, the discussion is based on the document which had been produced in 2003 and might not need to be extended for another period. Hence, my delegation is not particularly attached to the three-year period format. We can, of course, live with decisions that have already been taken and are ready to work on the basis of the programme work that has already been adopted.

As we discuss improving the effectiveness of the Disarmament Commission and the outcome of our work, we need to take into consideration the final decisions the Commission will take. As was mentioned by other delegations, perhaps only three or four of the documents produced by the Disarmament Commission are being recalled at our meetings. On the one hand, this shows that the Disarmament Commission can indeed play an effective and important role by providing recommendations and guidelines in certain areas. But, on the other hand, even when the Commission issues a final document or comes to a final conclusion, those decisions are not subsequently being implemented, inter alia through multilateral agreements. In this regard, my delegation supports the viewpoint just stated by the representative of Sierra Leone regarding the necessity of a dialogue between the Chairs of the Disarmament Commission, the First Committee and the Conference on Disarmament, on

what can be called the distribution of labour. In the opinion of my delegation, the Disarmament Commission should play the role of integrator of ideas that can be implemented later on or laid down as a basis for further multilateral agreements. In order to do this, I believe it will be important for all of us — maybe not this year but starting next year — while debating the improvement of the effectiveness of the work of the Disarmament Commission, to start thinking about future agenda items for the Disarmament Commission for the next period.

Mr. Najafi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the issue of measures for improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Disarmament Commission.

I have several general comments and proposals. In our view, in spite of the successful efforts of the international community through the existing disarmament machinery — for example, treaties and instruments like the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) prohibiting biological weapons, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) mandating the total destruction of chemical weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) which comprehensively bans nuclear tests, as well as the guidelines for establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones and the principles for verification — this mechanism has unfortunately faced setbacks and has not produced satisfactory results in recent years.

While we believe that such setbacks are due mainly to the lack of political will, we share the view that the Commission could discuss possible measures for improving the effectiveness of its methods of work. There has been a similar effort in the First Committee, which indeed resulted in the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 58/41 and 59/95. In these resolutions, the Assembly reaffirmed its role in dealing with questions of disarmament and related international issues, consistent with the functions and powers of the Assembly in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments as stipulated in Article 11, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations.

We should not forget that over the years the Disarmament Commission has prepared consensus principles, guidelines and recommendations on a great number of subjects, which have been approved by the General Assembly. At the same time, the Disarmament Commission has gradually focused its work on a limited number of agenda items at each session. In 1989, the Commission had a maximum of four items, but since then it has decreased the agenda items to two items with the possibility of a third, each of which has usually been discussed for three consecutive years.

In 1998, by its consensus decision 52/492, the General Assembly decided that, as of 2000, the agenda would normally comprise two substantive items. We should not lose sight of the fact that this decision has been implemented only once, from 2000 to 2003, but the result was not satisfactory. One item was near consensus, and the other item was discussed thoroughly in the substantive sessions. Therefore, as stated by the representative of NAM, the provisions contained in decision 52/492 to enhance the efficient functioning of the Disarmament Commission remain relevant, and the substantive agenda of the Commission should comprise two agenda items per year drawn from the whole range of disarmament issues, including one on nuclear disarmament, with the possibility, of course, of a third item.

My delegation would also like to underline that, as agreed before, the Commission, as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, should function under the Assembly's rules of procedure, with necessary modifications, of course, and decisions on substantive issues should be adopted by consensus.

Having said that, we have some ideas that we would like to share with the members of the Commission. We believe that, while the Commission should reaffirm decision 52/492, there could be a recommendation that it try to adopt its agenda at the organizational session so as to give enough time before the substantive session to the Chairman to hold informal consultations on matters before the Commission.

The other idea is to urge member States to distribute their position papers on the agenda items, if any, and the chairmen of the working groups to distribute their own working papers well in advance of the substantive session in order to give the States members of the UNDC ample time to get views and instructions from their respective capitals.

In conclusion, in reaction to some of the questions raised by the Ambassador of Sierra Leone, we think the UNDC has already limited its agenda items to two. Indeed, that is a balanced approach that has been taken as a result of a gradual process over the years. Indeed, as I mentioned, in 1989, it had four items on the agenda, and limited the items to two as of 2000.

The major problem, as was stated by the Non-Aligned Movement, is the lack of political will and, however clever and smart the procedures and methods of work, unfortunately they cannot solve that problem. But we remain optimistic that perhaps we could improve the effectiveness of the methods of the UNDC.

The Chairman: Regarding the proposals made by the representative of Iran and one of the issues he raised about the adoption of our agenda, I think this year we adopted the agenda at the organizational session. We did that, but I think that he is suggesting that we make it more of an institution.

Another issue he raised is about working papers to be presented in advance. For that, we would need to organize the Commission well in advance. This year, we still have to elect one of our working group chairmen, so under the circumstances it would be extremely difficult to expect working papers to come out in advance.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): My delegation also associates itself with the views expressed by the Non-Aligned Movement. Our delegation would, however, like to make a few comments in addition. We have listened very carefully to the views expressed by other delegations as well.

As we stated in our statement during the exchange of views, the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) is being convened in a larger context. As we said, there are clear differences of perspective, approach and modalities for dealing with disarmament and other issues. That is the larger context in which we consider the agenda item on improving the working methods as well.

As we see it, the issue of improving the working methods is a matter both of substance and of procedure. We share the view that the UNDC needs to be strengthened and revitalized. We also share the view that it should be enabled to deliver the results that it has been able to deliver in the past and that it has the potential to deliver in the future. The main challenge is: How do we do it?

We share the view expressed by many delegations that we need a fuller exchange of views and dialogue, and we think that perhaps, as a part of that larger exchange of views, the Commission could consider the larger issue of how to develop common approaches and modalities to deal with nuclear and conventional disarmament.

As we said in our statement, the Commission could consider the possibility of convening its own special session to evolve and develop a new security consensus. That is what is required. As many delegations have stated, it is not a question of procedure; it is a question of political will, and we can make headway only if we have an agreement or a consensus on the major issues.

Mr. Prasad (India): We welcome this opportunity to cogitate on improving the methods of work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) and would like to share at this conjecture our very brief comments.

My delegation first associates itself with the statement made on the subject by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. The Commission, as a universal body, reflects the interests of all States Members of the United Nations and therefore, as a deliberative body, its work has special value. As part of the triad concerning disarmament, the Commission has intrinsic strengths which must therefore be preserved. It has notable achievements to its credit, as we recalled in our general statement, in formulating principles, guidelines and recommendations on a whole range of issues on the contemporary disarmament agenda.

We also agree with the view already expressed that the problems of the global disarmament machinery, including the Commission, are located not in processes but in politics. We are nevertheless prepared to consider practical, constructive and pragmatic measures to improve the functioning of the Commission. Those could, perhaps, come principally through housekeeping improvements, which even the best of institutions require from time to time.

The bottom line for us is that our present exercise should not weaken, but rather strengthen the role of the

Commission, restore credibility to its functioning, and enable it once again to contribute to global disarmament efforts.

Mr. Rodriguez Zahar (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is my first statement at this session, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, as well as the Bureau.

I would like simply to offer a few thoughts which may sound a little pessimistic. I agree with almost everything that the Ambassador of Sierra Leone said, and I also agree with the assessment made by the Non-Aligned Movement in its document, especially the paragraph that mentions the lack of political will on the part of certain States to deal with certain subjects and make progress in those areas. The paralysis that afflicts the disarmament machinery clearly reflects that.

However, we must also recognize that there is a lack of political will on the part of States in general to change their practices and working methods. We must recognize that, aside from the rhetoric we have heard to the effect that the will exists to consider new, practical measures, the fact of the matter is that States all are to blame. We all bear responsibility for not being willing to change our practices. This applies to simple issues, ranging from the one mentioned by Iran of distributing documents before meetings, to more substantive issues, such as the ones mentioned by the representatives of Sierra Leone and of Brazil. We see no willingness at all to modify our practices when it comes to the use of our time, nor is there any will at all to make further changes as concerns agenda items. In short, we see very little will on the part of States truly to change their practices.

It is not a problem only in the Commission; it is a widespread one that affects the Organization as a whole. Discussions on the question of revitalization have taken the form of hollow rhetoric, and I do not think that is going to accomplish anything.

Really, that is all I wanted to say. Perhaps my comments may sound a little harsh, but I think they are realistic. We are, in a way, caught in a trap — between certain States that do not wish to discuss particular issues or make progress on them, and the rest of the members, which do not wish to change their practices either. That is where we stand.

Mr. Landman (Netherlands): I am taking the floor because I am, unfortunately, leaving at the end of the week; my deputies will take over thereafter. But I am somewhat regretful that we have not made more progress during this first week, which represents one third of the time that is available to us.

Now, focusing on the subject at hand and having listened carefully to all the contributions, I can see that, at least, there is common ground, in the sense that we all want to strengthen this body, which we all feel still has great potential — a conclusion reached based on its utility in the past. Furthermore, this body has a clear, dual complementarity. There is complementarity with respect to the First Committee, in the sense that the First Committee is highly political and has to work very fast, while this is really a deliberative forum — a forum for in-depth reflection. In terms of numbers, there is also complementarity with respect to the Conference on Disarmament, because the Conference, of course, has only 65 members, while all Members of the United Nations are represented here. This body therefore has clear importance and a clear use.

In concrete terms, I am always struck, in the United Nations framework, by how much time is spent on generalities. In that sense, I very much appreciate the very pertinent questions posed by our colleague from Sierra Leone — questions that have to be answered. I took note of some concrete points, and I would like to dwell on one particular one on which I have very strong feelings, on the basis of my rather lengthy multilateral experience in other multilateral forums. I would, indeed, align myself with some of the suggestions that have been put forward.

A word of caution on the idea, raised earlier, that we could focus on one subject instead of two. At first blush, this sounds very interesting, because that would allow us more time and a more in-depth discussion. However, I can tell the Commission that this has been tried in many other forums, and it has never worked. So aside from the fact that it will make it even more difficult to come to any kind of compromise — because, in a multilateral framework, one always has to compromise, so that everyone can feel that their concerns have been, in essence, taken on board — and aside from the fact that it will be even more difficult to reach agreement on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission, the Commission will find that discussing only one subject never works. There will be long silences and gaps. Let us not attempt to reinvent the wheel.

Now as regards concrete proposals, on the basis of our recent experience I would favour the composition of the Bureau in advance, in a timely manner. We have lost a full week with respect to the important work of the Commission, which is the basic reason I am here, for instance — in vain. For those who take the trouble to come here from Geneva, it is important that our time be well spent. In that sense, my experience does not bode too well for the future.

There is another advantage. Indeed, a proposal was made to present papers in advance so as to limit general statements to the extent possible and to truly focus on what we want to achieve at this session. We must be focused. We spend too much time on generalities.

These are two concrete proposals that truly merit attention. I hope that, in further deliberations, we will come up with additional good ideas.

Mr. Minami (Japan): I shall be brief. Japan, like many other countries, attaches great importance to the consensus reached among Member States with regard to the new agenda item on measures for improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Disarmament Commission.

I do not wish to reiterate my previous statement, made in plenary, on the mandate. We have to dispel, through intensive deliberations on the effectiveness of our methods of work, the bad reputation that the Disarmament Commission has acquired in the past few years.

Japan is prepared actively to participate in such discussions so as to meet the high expectations of the international community.

These are just general remarks; Japan will present concrete proposals in a later statement, if necessary.

Mr. Despax (France) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor at the present session, permit me at the outset, Sir, to congratulate you on your assumption of the chairmanship and, through you, to congratulate all the other members of the Bureau. In addition, I am pleased at the announcement that this afternoon, you nominated our Beninese colleague in the Bureau as a Vice-Chairperson. I also welcome the presence of Ambassador Tanaka, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs.

My delegation is pleased to see the Disarmament Commission resume its substantive work this year, after several years of hiatus. We see the agreement reached on the agenda as an encouraging sign. Today, the Chairman has invited us to engage in an exchange of views on the issue of improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Commission.

Obviously, my delegation fully subscribes to the statement made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, which set out a number of general principles to guide the joint activities of the 25 Union members related to that subject.

The multilateral disarmament architecture governing us today is well known. It comprises three key elements, some have called it a triad. The first is negotiation, which some here know well because they come from Geneva: the Conference on Disarmament, which has a limited membership — 65 member States. Secondly, there is research, which is often forgotten but which is important to us in Geneva: the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, designed to provide States, the Secretary-General and the Department for Disarmament Affairs with appropriate expertise on security and disarmament issues. And thirdly, there are deliberations with universal membership, which we in New York know very well: the General Assembly's First Committee and the Disarmament Commission, which is meeting today. While the First Committee is often limited by political and scheduling constraints, the Disarmament Commission has greater freedom to discuss security problems involving both the issue of weapons of mass destruction and that of conventional weapons.

The issue that brings us together today is: what contribution can the Disarmament Commission make to our common objective, the strengthening of international peace and security? In the view of my delegation, it must be to respond to the traditional and new threats facing the world. The European Security Strategy adopted in December 2003 by the heads of State or Government of the European Union lists five: terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, regional conflicts, the failure of States, and organized crime. Only by responding to those threats will we strengthen the multilateral disarmament machinery, to which we are all deeply committed. If we fail to do so, there would be a great risk that our forums would be circumvented for sui generis or ad hoc forums with

limited, non-universal membership, whose main drawback or handicap is their lack of legitimacy and thus their lack of effectiveness. In that regard, the importance of consensus is crucial.

France supports all concrete and realistic initiatives that can enhance the effectiveness of the Commission's methods of work. Together with its European partners, France will contribute to such initiatives in the context of the European discussions that we are to have on that subject in the next few days. Thus, we will come back to the Disarmament Commission under the aegis of the Austrian presidency.

But let us make no mistake: this exercise cannot replace the necessary political will of States to make the best possible use of the current architecture, which was laid down nearly 30 years ago, while adapting it to the security challenges of the twenty-first century.

Mr. Bravaco (United States of America): I just wanted to observe that I think we are off to a very good start. I have heard at last half a dozen concrete proposals advanced this morning, in addition to the guideposts for broad discussion that the representative of Sierra Leone presented. So I think we have some meat on the table.

I would also caution against rejecting out of hand at the outset any particular proposal or idea, including the idea of one issue per session. Everything is on the table as far as the United States is concerned. I would like to encourage that approach on the part of other Governments as well as we move forward.

I have one final request. If it were possible for the Secretariat to issue a revised schedule of meetings once the selection process for Working Group I has been completed so that we can see exactly how much time we have left for each issue, I would be grateful.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of the United States for his suggestion regarding a work programme. I would like to assure him that the Bureau is working on a revised work programme and will issue it soon.

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): I would like to hear reactions to the ideas concerning the relationship between the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission in terms of dialogue. That is not only because it was mentioned in paragraph 3 of last year's resolution on the report of the Disarmament Commission (resolution 60/91), but also — and this may be a provocative statement — because, from our perspective, the Conference on Disarmament is becoming a bit more of a deliberative organ and less of a negotiating body, when the Conference is stuck in terms of negotiation. Here we need only look at the report of the Conference. I hope that if some members of the Conference are here with us today, they will not beat me over the head for saying this, but it appears that when there is an ebb in their work, when they have no negotiation and are stuck, that encroaches on our own work to a large extent. So in my view, the Conference on Disarmament is becoming, as I said, more of a deliberative body than a negotiating body.

We might want to look into some of that. Perhaps this is just the view of one delegation, but again, institutionally speaking and in terms of the mandate entrusted to us by the General Assembly, there must be this kind of dialogue. How it will be worked out and what its format will be will have to be determined, but I think we should look seriously into it.

The Chairman: At this stage, I would like to invite Mr. Tanaka, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, to share his observations on this issue with us.

Mr. Tanaka (Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs): I have listened very attentively to the discussion this morning. Since this is the first time I have sat in this body, I naturally have my own observations. I shall be rather brief. But perhaps, coming from outside, I might have a different perspective. I hope that we will be able to discuss some of my observations at a later stage next week.

The first impression that I have had, listening to this body, is that certainly the subject itself has such a wide spectrum, so it is very difficult to pinpoint what we are discussing. It is like kicking a ball in a huge soccer stadium — there are many balls rolling around in this corner or that corner — and discussion tends to be dispersed and sometimes not really focused.

Also, as members know, disarmament is closely associated with the security situation of today, and the situation is moving and the world is constantly changing. Of course, political will is constantly changing too. Somehow, the three-year term of the agenda that we are discussing does not really fit into that kind of changing situation. Maybe next week, when we get into the working group, all those

problems may be solved and we may have more focused discussions and a greater convergence of views on certain issues. But my distinct impression is that, perhaps, the subject matter is so vast and so varied. Furthermore, this plenary is a body in which to air statements; therefore, it is very difficult for us to really exchange views.

All in all, I have a certain impression, for the first time sitting in this body, that perhaps we need some way to develop and to help the discussion to be more focused. From that perspective, I have two observations.

The first is that, in the usual multilateral bodies of which I have had experience over many years, the Secretariat has played the crucial role of providing certain papers, opinions or expert reviews. Of course, we are all aware that a reform plan is going on in the United Nations and we should avoid writing any unnecessary papers. I would certainly agree to that. At the same time, for example, if we broach the issue of confidence-building measures, there are many such measures, including regional and thematic, but the discussion on confidence-building measures tends to be unfocused. Thus, perhaps from time to time, just a short paper from the Secretariat describing the confidence-building measure might help. I am not quite sure. I have, of course, to reflect on what I have thought and said today in the following days and week to come, but perhaps sometimes the Secretariat's interaction might be helpful.

Also in the same vein, outside experts, who would give members a certain focus on thematic issues, might help delegations to discuss certain issues. Such ways to help focus the discussions of this body might lead to more substantive exchanges among delegations. It is, of course, presumptuous of me to give my opinions after spending just five days listening to what members have discussed, but I thought that this would be the most opportune moment to talk about it because we are fortunate to be given the opportunity to discuss procedural issues today. So perhaps this is the moment when I should speak. That is why I took the floor.

The Chairman: I thank Under-Secretary-General Tanaka for sharing his views on this important issue. On behalf of the Commission, I can assure him that we highly appreciate the contribution of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and look forward to more contributions from it in the future.

Having said that, I think we have had a very good initial round of discussions on this issue. As I announced earlier, we will continue our discussion on the same issue on Monday afternoon. I think, for the benefit of our next meeting, I would like to try to summarize what I have been hearing from delegations today.

I think most of them have been talking about five or six issues, the first of which is the role of the Disarmament Commission in general. Several representatives talked about how effective and relevant the Disarmament Commission is in the context of the overall United Nations machinery on disarmament. I do not know if that will constitute part of our discussion on working methods, but that is what some delegations raised and I think it has to do with our evaluation of the working methods in general. That was one issue.

Secondly, I think many representatives talked about the Commission's agenda in the context of whether the current three-year cycle is proper or whether the number of issues we are dealing with is appropriate. Do we need more issues or fewer? Those are certainly questions raised by some delegations.

Thirdly, some representatives also talked about the modality of the meetings we now have and whether the length of the plenary substantive session is suitable. Are three weeks long enough or too brief? Do we need any additional meetings, such as in a special session? Those are some of the questions they raised.

Fourthly, we heard some representatives talk about organizational issues, such as the composition of the Bureau and documentation. Can we agree to the formation of the Bureau earlier than we are doing now so that we can have it in advance and let its members prepare themselves for this session? Can we have the papers well in advance? Those are some of the questions raised.

Fifthly, I also think that some representatives talked about the rules of procedure, including the decision-making methods we now have, based on consensus. We might want to look at those rules and see if we can make any improvement on them.

Lastly, I think several representatives talked about relations between the Disarmament Commission

and other bodies dealing with disarmament, such as the First Committee or the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

For the next meeting on Monday, I would like to encourage all members to come up with more concrete ideas and views on those issues and any others they think should be discussed in the context of improvements to our working methods. My game plan after that is that, after we have another meeting on this issue and listen to more countries — and representatives who spoke today can be more specific next time — as I promised, I will try to form a "friends of the chair" on this issue, probably a couple of them, so that they can work with all member States with a view to coming up with any products or conclusion to this discussion we are now having. Possibly, the friends will also use the form of informal meetings, if there is any need, in addition to the formal plenary meetings we now have.

Having said that, there will be a Working Group II meeting this afternoon, starting at 3 p.m. in the same conference room. I will see members next at 3 p.m. next Monday in the same conference room again.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.